

1. Stories are just Stories

In Myanmar stories are not just stories, they should be believed and followed. A foreigner who comes to Myanmar may soon realize this. A lot of superstition and unfounded beliefs make the life of Burmese people so fantastic and colorful. Yet it is all in opposition to the Buddhist way of disillusioning, searching way out of the ignorance and illusion on the deepest level – the belief in self.

I was enough fortunate to encounter and believe in nonsensical bluffs, later finding out how I was mocked for my trust. The first one I remember was about bananas – when I was just 5 years old, a friend of mine told me, that the tip of bananas should be removed, because sometimes snakes that crawl in trees deposit their eggs in it. At that time I didn't know much about snakes neither about bananas, so I believed him. Obviously, neither do bananas grow in trees, nor do snake's eggs fit in bananas, and let's not forget that the tip of bananas was formerly the banana flower.¹

When I found the unsubstantial character of such stories, either because they were explained to me or because I later realized, I didn't feel very happy. I am very keen on disillusioning others when they believe in a story which is not true. Unfortunately, stories from Buddhist scriptures etc. are not so easy to "debunk", hence I try to find them as useful as possible – until I can learn their true origin. An example of such stories was the deadly bite of a spider on toilet in the last NewPilgrim. Another one, in an earlier NewPilgrim was the idea that fruit should be eaten first and just then the main meal.

Now I would like to share with you another "revelation". There is a very famous picture of the Buddha, which is believed to "appear" in a film after photographing a tree in India. Unfortunately, as we can learn from the comment below the explanation, this is not at all a mysterious appearance of the Buddha in a photo, but rather a painting of oil on canvas by a Spanish artist.

<http://wisdomquarterly.blogspot.com/2008/12/photograph-of-buddha.html>

"There exists a curious image of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama. It was reputedly taken or at least discovered in Bodhgaya, India, in 1980. A devotee, it is said, was photographing the site of Shakyamuni's ("Sage of the Shakyas") great enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. The image, not seen at the time of photographing, subsequently appeared on the film.

It is an image of a very comely young meditator with a top knot, robe, and almost cosmetic details. The photograph has not been widely circulated. It may inspire the faithful or arouse doubt. One copy hangs at the Bhavana Society, a Theravadan monastery/nunnery in West Virginia, for all to see."

¹ Now thanks to this I am finding out that the original myth was about spiders depositing their eggs in the banana-flower. <http://www.burkemuseum.org/blog/myth-spider-eggs-bananas>

Comment:

The "curious image of the historical Buddha" that "subsequently appeared on the film" is a touched up photograph of the Buddha on the oil canvas painting called "Buddha's Temptations" by the Spanish artist Eduardo Chicharro Aguera (1873 - 1949) finished in 1921, and now in the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid, see https://www.flickr.com/photos/sheepdog_rex/10137535425/ and http://www.borsheimarts.com/news/2014_04-Madrid-Prado-Thyssen-BellasArtesSanFernando-Museums.htm

Yours,

Nyanatusita)

See also this link:

http://www.sabaidesignsgallery.com/product_info.php?info=p480_Asian-Antiques--Buddhist-Devotional-Painting-on-Canvass-Thailand.html&XTCSid=3c3d90b7a0899aa954dc6562a6e9e397

2. How to Admonish a Monk

Donning the saffron robe doesn't make a human enlightened. Most of monks are not enlightened at all, and it should not be expected that they are as perfect as the Buddha. This is not to criticize monks – rather to help you admit the fact as is and help the way you can.

<https://suttacentral.net/en/an7.59>

The Buddha's Teachings, Dhamma, will last as long as the monks, nuns, lay men, and lay women have respect one for each other –

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Kimila, in the Bamboo Grove. Then Ven. Kimila went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: "What is the cause, lord, what is the reason why, when a Tathagata has become totally unbound (has entered total Nibbana), the true Dhamma does not last a long time?"

"Kimila, there is the case where, when a Tathagata has become totally unbound, the monks, nuns, male lay followers, & female lay followers live without respect, without deference, for the Teacher; live without respect, without deference, for the Dhamma... the Sangha... the Training... concentration... heedfulness; live without respect, without deference, for hospitality. This is the cause, this is the reason why, when a Tathagata has become totally unbound, the true Dhamma does not last a long time."

"And what is the cause, what is the reason why, when a Tathagata has become totally unbound, the true Dhamma does last a long time?"

"Kimila, there is the case where, when a Tathagata has become totally unbound, the monks, nuns, male lay followers, & female lay followers live with respect, with deference, for the Teacher; live with respect, with deference, for the Dhamma... the Sangha... the Training... concentration... heedfulness; live with respect, with deference, for hospitality. This is the cause, this is the reason why, when a Tathagata has become totally unbound, the true Dhamma does last a long time."

This however doesn't mean, that monks do not admonish one another – in fact, they would have an offence if they knowingly hide or ignore other monk's offence (unless they are afraid of being beaten). Monks that are admonished are not allowed to disregard the admonishment, nor are they allowed to say they will first ask a teacher and just then follow. This all is related to the first 227 rules of monks, not to the other.

Admonishing somebody is a very risky job, especially if you live in a community with many monks. The risk is, that you may be admonished, or you may be thrown away from the community – if you admonish for little things, esp. when wrong about the rule's interpretation. I've recently heard that a Western monk was not allowed to enter Shwe Oo Min Monastery, simply because he was a "corrector" when he was here last time. So, if you want Shwe Oo Min, then mind your business ... right?

Nope. It is not to that extreme either. A reasonable way or reminding a fellow venerable regarding serious offence – that is in fact invited and very helpful. Reminding little issues such as not eating from the same dish – these will be understood as annoyance, nothing but that – moreover, if the admonisher is a younger monk and the admonished a senior one. (I have done this one time to a monk a 'rains' older than me, and I remember the awkward feeling on both sides. At that time the issue was on the verge of Sanghadisesa, though.) Requesting to do confession at that moment is something absurd, at least in terms of the monastic culture in Myanmar. Note that the littlest rules are not understood as "offence" if they are not broken out of sheer disrespect for the rules.

I have decided to share with you this topic because it relates to lay people as well. Monks are not allowed to disregard admonishment regarding 227 rules by a fellow monk, but not even by a lay person. Lay people may admonish a monk – yes! – and it is perfectly alright. If they admonish him regarding one of the 227 rules, he simply must follow, unless the lay person is wrong or the monk has "learned it differently from his teacher". This is the sentence a monk may use to avoid following what another monk said – "my teacher explained the rule differently", if it is, obviously, true.

Being reminded of a mistake is very important and very good thing. It is very beneficial for a society when the individuals know their mistakes and learn how to correct them. For that the Buddha devised the "confession", a small ritual where a monk with an offence meets a monk who has not committed that offence and sincerely confesses his offences to his friend, promising he will "restrain" himself next time.

In Asian countries admonishing is rarely done by younger monks to the elders, and Vinaya Pitaka – Parivara Pali states that one's preceptor should be admonished only regarding Sanghadisesas and Parajikas. It is however suitable to admonish a younger monk in a polite way. This may be done by simply showing how to do the thing right (e.g. instead of saying "it is prohibited to eat from the same vessel", it can be said "venerable sir, it will be more hygienic if you eat from your bowl, please"). The reference to Vinaya has not been so much observed by me during my stay in Shwe Oo Min – if a sayadaw who has memorized all five books of Vinaya Pitaka wants to remind me of a rule, they rarely say that it is from Vinaya Pitaka – neither does the Visuddhimagga – and instead say "it should be done this way", "that way it should not be done", etc. Sayadaw/Teacher of course may blame and scold his disciple if the disciple

disbehaves. The Pacittiya rule about “throwing somebody out of monastery” allows to throw away one’s direct disciple if he disbehaves or causes discord in the community of monks. There is no offence for taking him by neck and throwing him outside of the monastery, likewise for throwing away his stuff. (Which doesn’t seem very “respectful”, though ...)

3. A Drunkard became a Stream-Enterer? Nope.

Long long ago I learned that somebody became a Stream-Enterer although he drank alcohol. This was not a complete information, and as my father would say – “half truth is the perfect lie”. The Sakyan Sarakani did drink alcohol, but at the time of death he stopped drinking, practiced very hard morality (sīla), meditation (samādhi) and wisdom (paññā), and on account of very ardent practice of such meritorious deeds he became a Stream-Enterer.

See the sutta here: <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn55/sn55.024.wlsh.html>

Sarakani Sutta - SN 5.55. Sotapatti Samyutta - 3. 3(23) & 4(24) Sārakā.ni S. (Sara.nāni S.) (BB SN 1811ff.)

4. Wizard’s Nest

A couple of weeks ago I visited the Mt. Popa, the magnificent tower-like natural structure, which majestically oversees the area of the mountains around. What is less known about this hill, is that right next to it is a hidden monastery of rishis and wizards where one of the most famous wizard in Myanmar attained to his supremacy. Bo Min Khaung is the elder of the Burmese greatest wizards of modern times, the second being Bo Bo Aung. Bo Min Khaung is much worshipped in Burmese families, his statue is so common in home-altars and even around many pagodas, that it is hard to believe he was not a monk, nor even (not even a little bit!) enlightened. In fact, these wizards believe enlightenment is no more possible – so they try to gain magical powers and extend their life, until they can see a Buddha and become enlightened during his Dhamma discourse.

The place next to Mt. Popa that I visited is easily accessible by following the road left from the Mt. Popa (facing the Mt. Popa) and going until it finishes with a small part up a little bit raised platform. From there you can see a little walking path down, and at the fork take the left. Walk and walk and walk – and you will come to a beautiful monastery with magnificent statues. When I arrived there I met there a single rishi, ven. Sunandasiddhi. He can’t speak English, it seems, but his Burmese is clear and he is willing to discuss life of rishis, Dhamma and other topics too. He told me it is alright for foreigners to come and meditate. Why meditate there? In that very monastery you can enter the cave of Bo Min Kaung and meditate at the place of one of the greatest wizards of Burma. Or you can simply enjoy the paradisaical peace of that place, enough far from any road to hear a noise, far from people’s villages and shops. Not however too far to go back near the Mt. Popa for alms-round or buy whatever you need (as a lay person).

For those interested, note this address:

သာသနာပြုစခန်း ကျောက်တစ်လုံး (ပုပ္ဖိုးတောင်) – Tharthanapyu Sakhan: Kyauk-Ta-Lone (Mt. Popa)



Looking inside the Bo Min Kaung's cave through a narrow space between the cave's wall and the ground.



The Buddha with his first monk-disciples as teaching the first Dhamma.

5. Map of Buddha's India

I've just found this map based on Google mapping system. I find it very nice. It is praised by suttacentral scholars, so I guess it may be quite trustworthy:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1D8myPgBPxUNfBweFjHaybCT3o4U>

May all beings be happy :-)

monk Sarana